

COVID Christmas: High anxiety around surging infections, but many won't commit to staying home for the holidays

For those who mark Christmas religiously, many will turn to tech and scripture in lieu of church

December 7, 2020 – From “Let it snow” to “Let it end”. From “Hang a shining star upon the highest bough” to “[We'll have to muddle through, somehow](#)”.

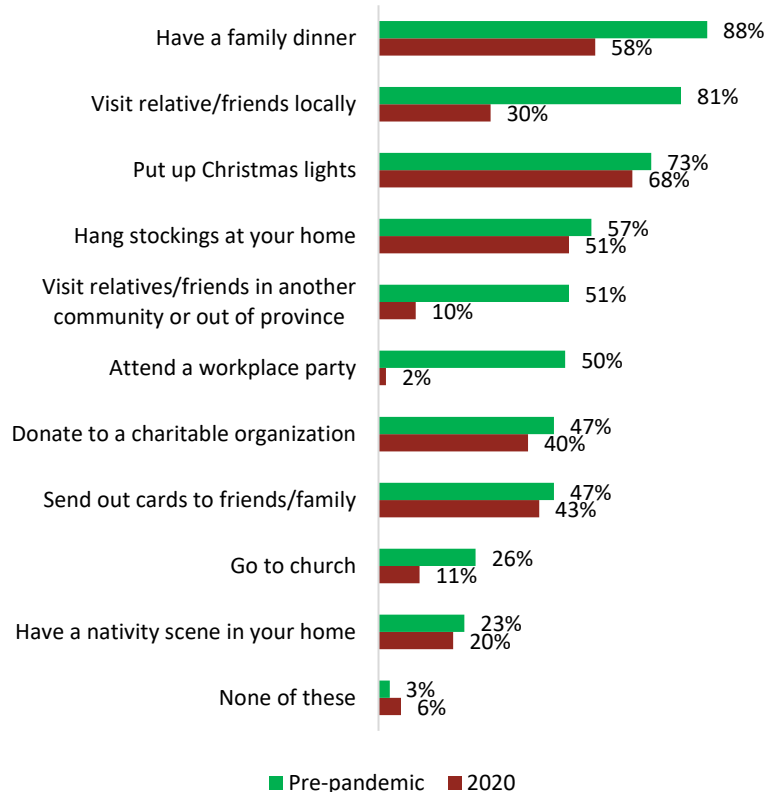
This year, as with everything, COVID-19 has changed the focus of the Christmas season. Top of mind topics in a pre-pandemic world might have centred on the economic or environmental impacts of the holidays. Now, it is focused more on difficult and often gut-wrenching decisions on whether to spend the holidays with family or friends.

New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute, in partnership with [Cardus](#), show that while most are choosing a more solitary rather than merry Christmas, a significant segment still plan to visit people outside their household, either locally or out of province.

Three-in-ten say they will be visiting with friends and family outside of their households locally. This includes 35 per cent in both Alberta and Quebec, where daily numbers of new COVID-19 infections are regularly setting records.

Potentially even more troubling, one-in-ten Canadians, including more than one-in-eight Albertans and one-in-seven Quebecers, are still planning to travel outside of their communities for the holidays.

Christmas activities: Pre-pandemic vs 2020
(n=5,003)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute, in partnership with Cardus, conducted an online survey from November 24 – 30, 2020 among a representative randomized sample of 5,003 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 1.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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More Key Findings:

- Four-in-five Canadians (81%) are concerned about their friends and family becoming sick. Those who are not concerned are twice as likely to say that they will be seeing friends and family both locally and outside of their home community during the holidays.
- Canadians who practice their faith during this season are looking to technology to stay safe. Nearly half (45%) say they will be participating in an online service this year, and 9 per cent will be using an app to pray or meditate.
- Despite the challenges of the season, spirits are not dampened. The same number of Canadians are looking forward to the holiday season as said this in 2019.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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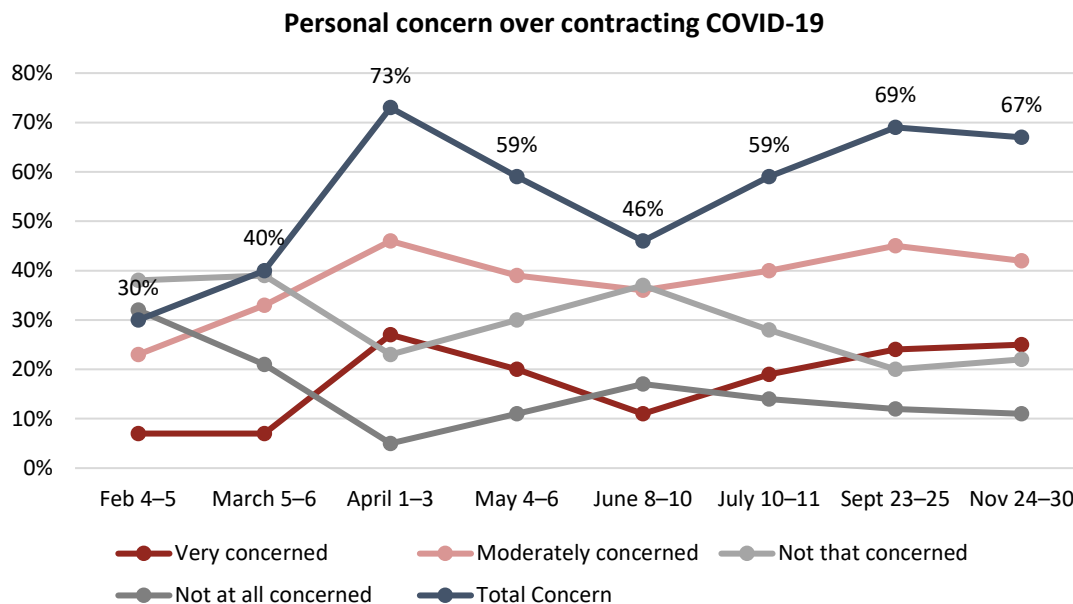
Part One: COVID Concerns Continue

With the second wave of COVID-19 crashing through the country, Canadians' anxiety remains elevated. Record levels of positive cases have been seen all across the nation, with Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba bearing the worst of the recent cases on a per capita basis, and Atlantic Canadians temporarily disbanding the four-province bubble that had allowed for free movement in that region.

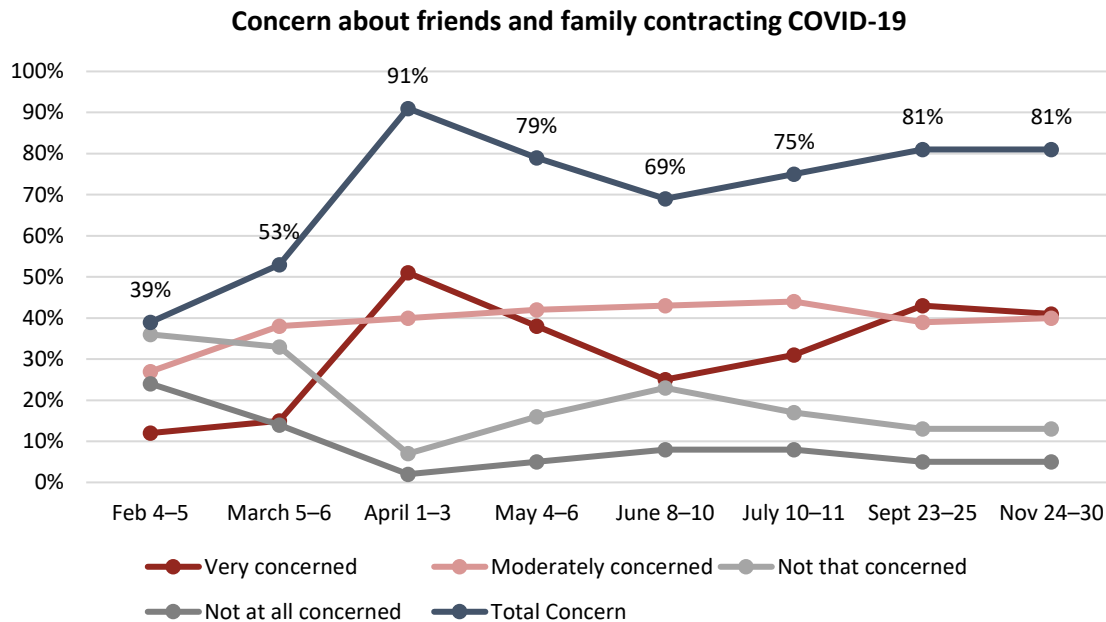
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With the holidays approaching, two-thirds say they are concerned about potentially becoming ill. These levels are slightly below those registered in April, when the virus was more of an unknown quantity. One-in-four (25%) say they are very concerned about the potential of sickness, led by those over the age of 54, as has been the case in previous data ([see detailed tables](#)).



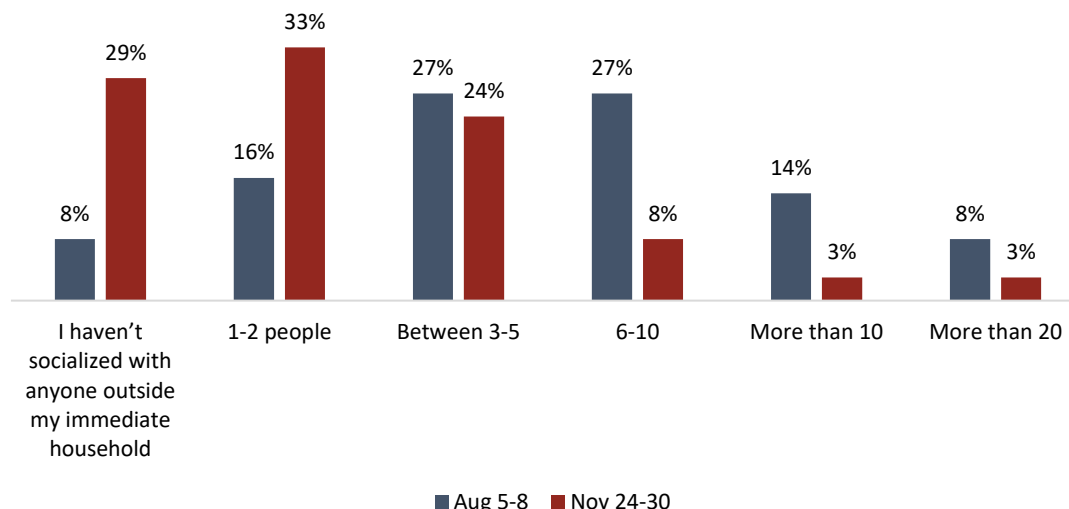
Time with family is a defining aspect of the holiday season. As public health officials in most of the country ask people to stay home whenever possible and interact only with their households, concern over illness potentially affecting others is high. Four-in-five (81%) say they worry about friends or family becoming sick, a number unchanged since cases began to rise in September:



Most are greatly reducing their social circles

Across Canada provincial leaders have asked their constituents to reduce their social circles in order to stem the rise in positive cases. The good news is that most have taken this request to heart. Only 14 per cent of Canadians say they have been seeing more than five people from outside of their household over the past few weeks. By contrast, in August, half of the population was socializing with groups of that size. More than three-in-five Canadians now say they are seeing two or fewer people from outside of their household:

Thinking about the last few weeks, about how many people outside your own household have you socialized or spent time with (if at all)?



Commitment to smaller social circles varies by region. In Manitoba, where the government has asked residents not to see anyone outside of their household, 54 per cent say they are doing so, while 40 per cent are seeing one to five people in addition to those they live with. In British Columbia, 44 per cent of residents are only seeing members of their own households. The proportion rises on the prairies and in central Canada. Those in Atlantic Canada are also more likely to be seeing more people, but have dealt with far fewer cases of COVID-19:

Thinking about the last few weeks, about how many people outside your own household have you socialized or spent time with (if at all)?										
(unweighted sample sizes)	Total (5,003)	Region								
		BC (603)	AB (602)	SK (497)	MB (499)	ON (1,049)	QC (855)	NB (260)	NS (336)	NL (242)
No one outside immediate household	29%	44%	27%	24%	54%	30%	20%	28%	20%	17%
1-5 people	57%	51%	55%	61%	40%	57%	62%	53%	58%	56%
6 or more	14%	5%	18%	16%	6%	14%	17%	18%	21%	28%

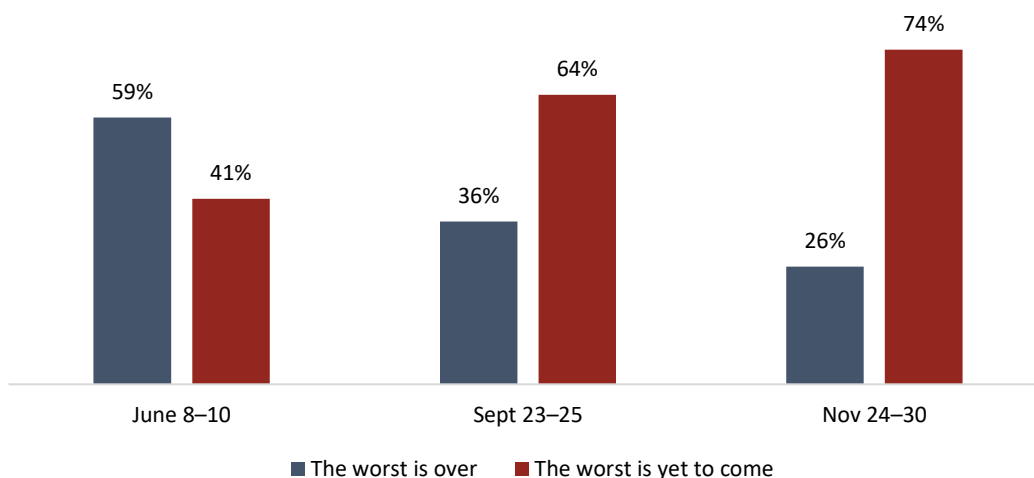
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Three-quarters expecting the worst to come

In June, after the national COVID-19 curve had largely been flattened, a firm majority of Canadians (59%) felt that the worst of the sickness was over. In September, when it became evident that a second wave was being realized, those opinions reversed, with 64 per cent feeling the opposite and expecting more negative health impacts for the country. That number has now increased to three-quarters (74%). The death toll in Canada has now surpassed 12,000 and the country is averaging more than 6,000 new cases per day, compared to a first wave peak of 1,800.

More people in my province becoming sick and dying due to COVID-19: Do you think that the worst is over, or yet to come?

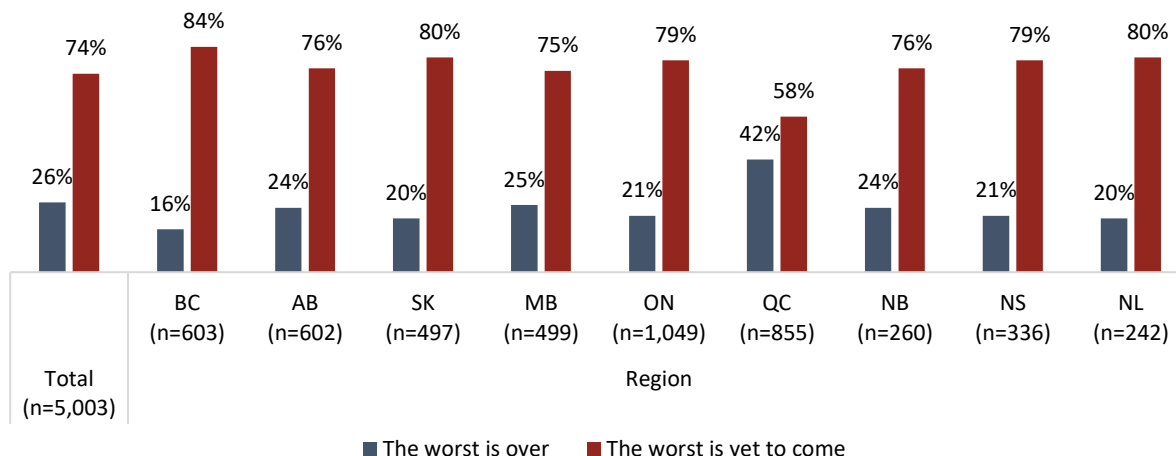


While majorities in every region of the country are preparing for the worst, the mood is decidedly more optimistic in Quebec, where the first wave of the virus was particularly devastating. That province, however, continues to deal with rising cases that well outweigh those recorded in the spring.

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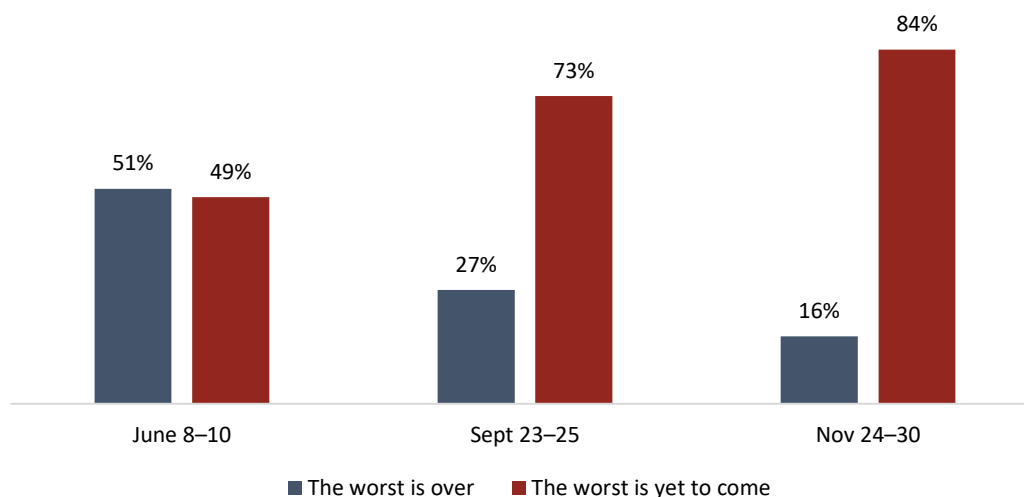
More people in your province becoming sick and dying due to COVID-19: do you think that the worst is over, or yet to come? (All respondents)



Economic anxiety high

The same increase in anxiety is noted when considering the economic aspects of the pandemic. More than four-in-five Canadians (84%) expect a worsening of economic conditions, which have contributed to the federal government recently reporting a [\\$381 billion](#) deficit projected for 2021.

Further loss of jobs and damage to businesses in my province due to COVID-19: Do you think that the worst is over, or yet to come?

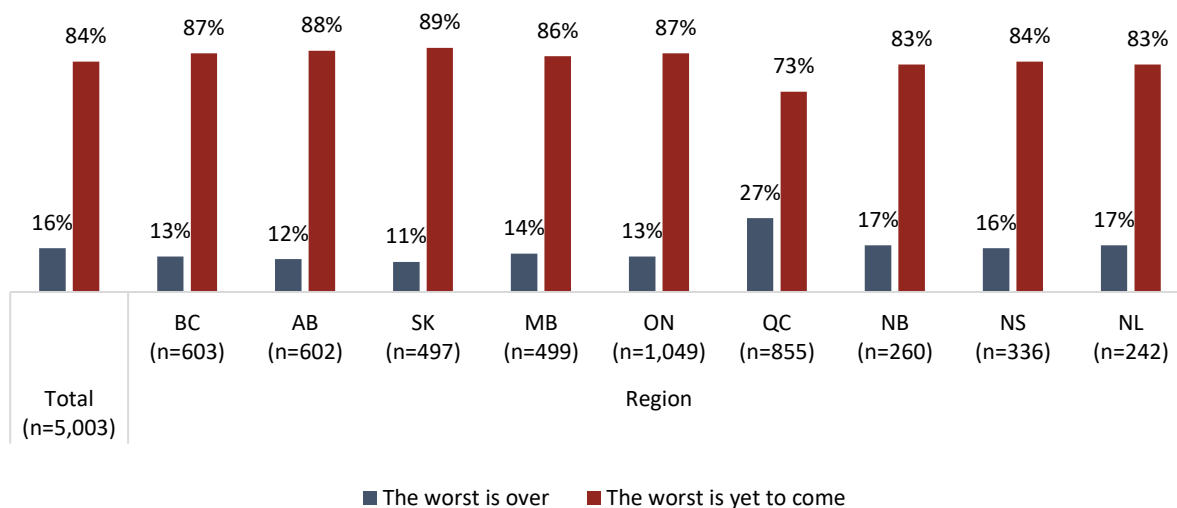


To understand the breadth of economic concern, consider these data by region. At least 73 per cent of residents in every region of the country expect that harder economic times will follow:

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Further loss of jobs and damage to businesses in your province due to COVID-19: do you think that the worst is over, or yet to come? (All respondents)



Personal financial worry highest in Alberta

Turning to the personal side of the financial anxiety, seven-in-ten (70%) say they are worried about their own finances and how they will be affected in the coming months. These worries are most acute in Alberta (46% very concerned), Saskatchewan (39%), and Ontario (39%), but are common everywhere.

How concerned are you about coronavirus hurting your personal financial situation?										
(unweighted sample sizes)	Total (5,003)	Region								
		BC (603)	AB (602)	SK (497)	MB (499)	ON (1,049)	QC (855)	NB (260)	NS (336)	NL (242)
Not at all/Not that concerned	31%	29%	21%	28%	31%	29%	37%	36%	40%	28%
Moderately concerned	33%	35%	33%	33%	33%	32%	33%	32%	26%	37%
Very concerned	37%	36%	46%	39%	36%	39%	31%	31%	34%	35%

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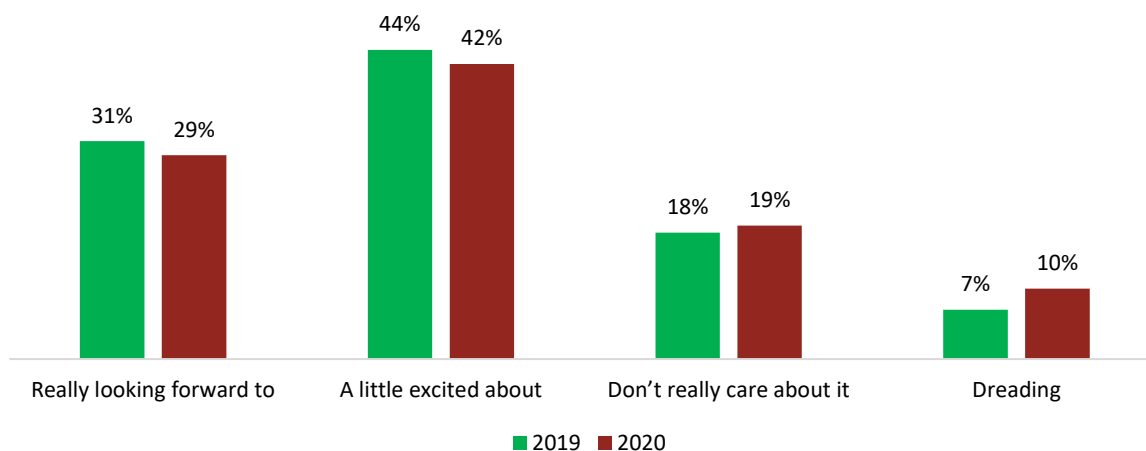
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Part Two: Holidays During the Pandemic

Christmas a welcome time of year, even if it's different

The holidays in 2020 present immense challenges for Canadians, as they have been asked to forego traditions and stay at home. Despite these changes, however, Canadians are looking forward to the season just as much as they normally would:

Would you say that as Christmas and the holiday season approaches, this is a time of year that you are...



Most, but not all, plan to follow recommended guidelines

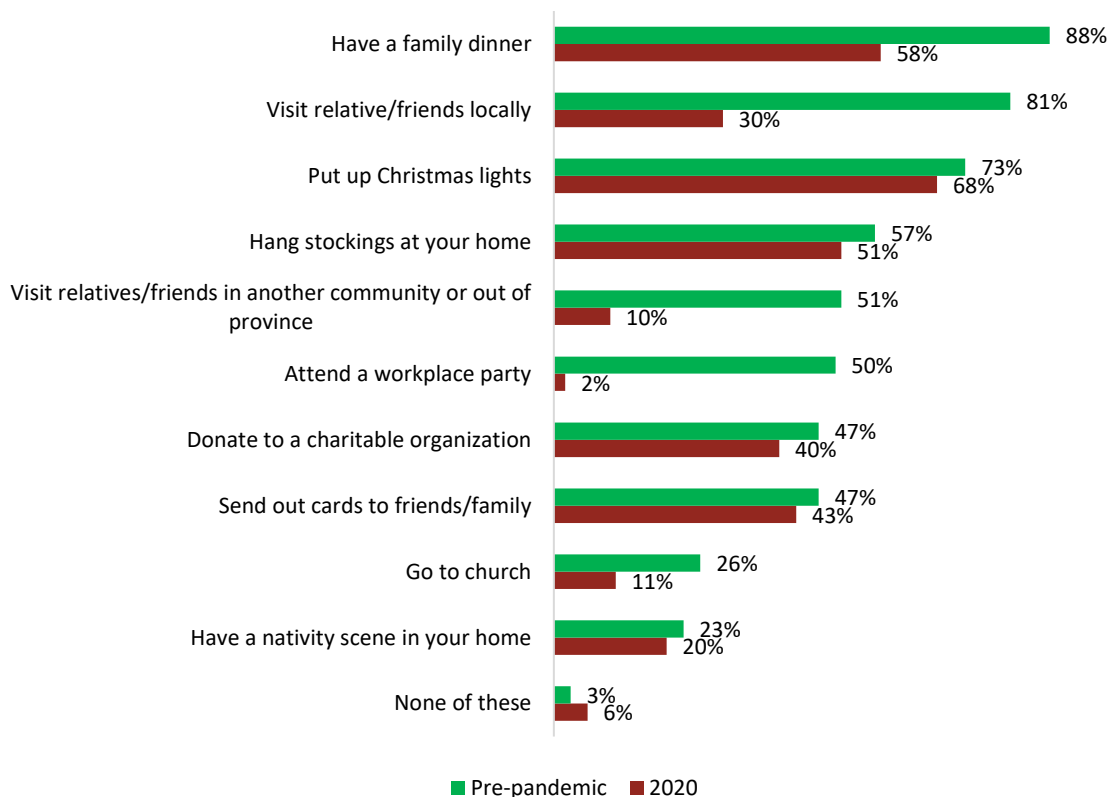
This time of year, whether one celebrates religiously or festively, is host to innumerable traditions. Family dinners, workplace parties and church services are an integral part of Christmas. This year, however, is not normal. Compared to last year, family dinners, visits with relatives locally and around the country, workplace parties and church services are all going to be greatly reduced.

Perhaps most important for public health officials this year is that Canadians stay where they are, rather than risk spreading the coronavirus between communities with holiday travel. In a normal year, half of Canadians (51%) would travel between communities or out of province to see friends and family, while this year just 10 per cent say they will:

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**Christmas activities: Pre-pandemic vs 2020
(n=5,003)**



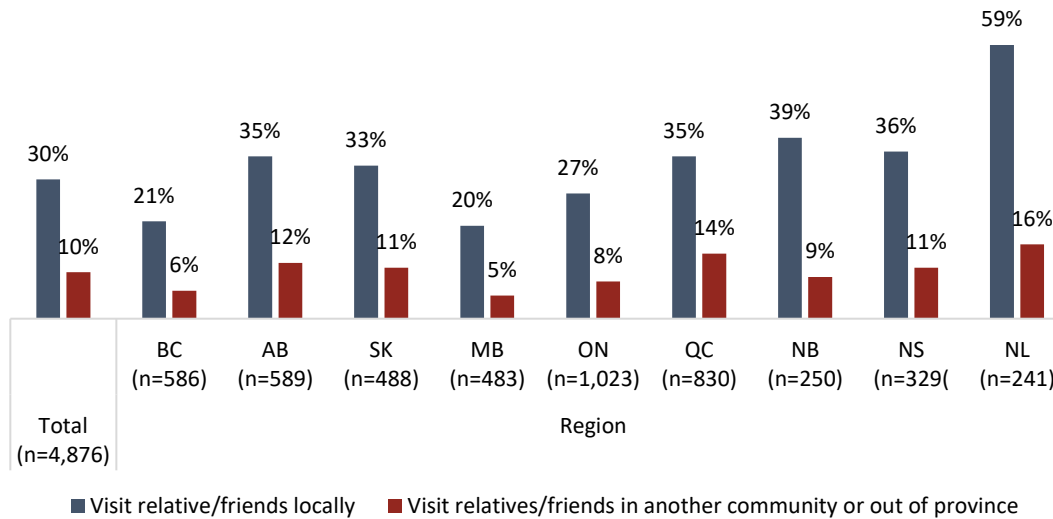
Despite these requests to avoid intra and interprovincial travel, 14 per cent of Quebec residents and 12 per cent of Albertans say they will do so. Those proportions are twice as high as they are in Manitoba (5%) or British Columbia (6%).

Further, three-in-ten (30%) say they will visit with friends and family locally. This is a fraction of the pre-pandemic proportion (81%) but may increase the likelihood of post-holiday public health challenges:

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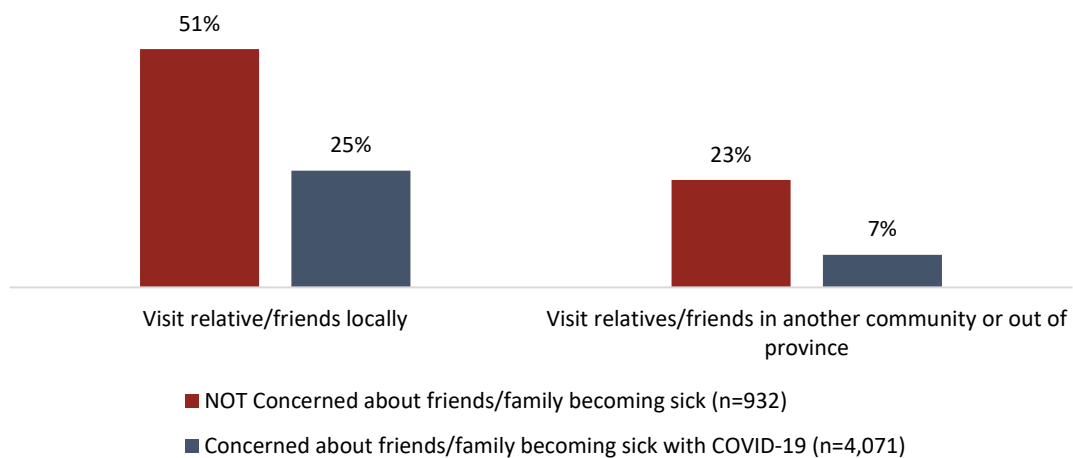
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Percentage who plan to do each of the following over the holidays:



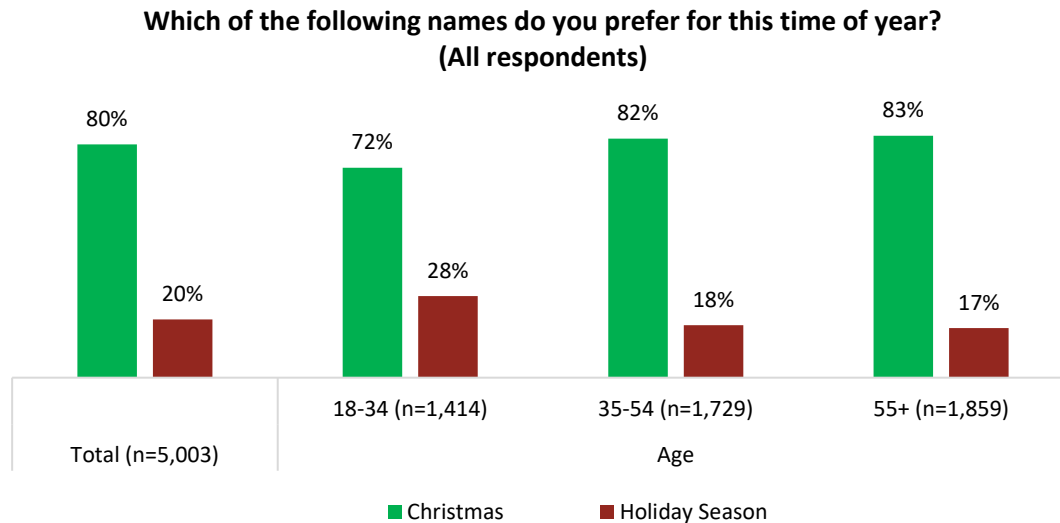
Concern about the coronavirus has an immense effect on Christmas plans. Though they represent a smaller portion of the population (19%), those who are not worried about friends or family becoming sick are twice as likely to visit friends locally, and three-times as likely to be traveling outside of their community:

Percentage that will be doing each, based on concern about friends or family becoming sick

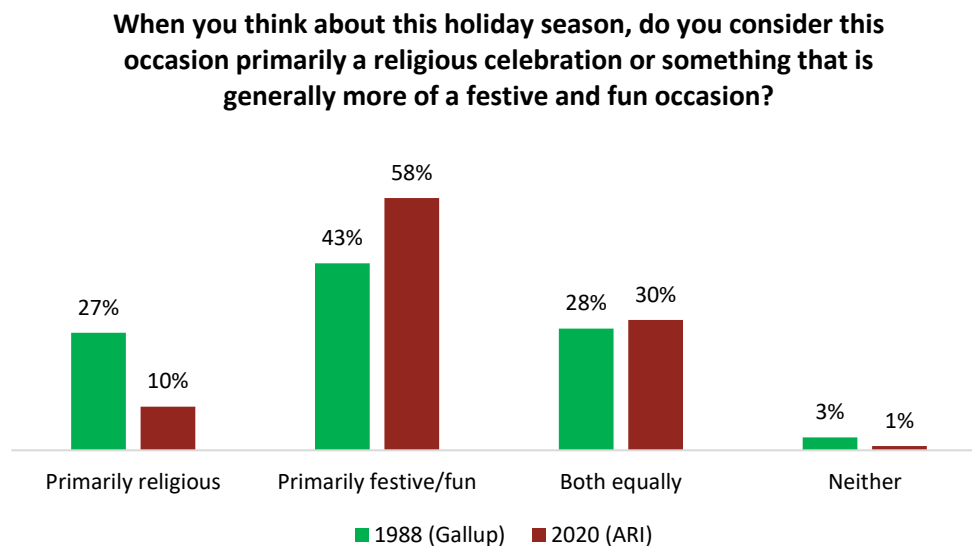


In Canada, it's still "Christmas", but it's not primarily religious

For the vast majority of Canadians, this time of year is the Christmas season, rather than the non-denominational "holiday season". It is worth noting, however, the changing demographics of this nomenclature:



That said, just because it is Christmas, does not necessarily mean that Canadians are observing the season from a faith-based perspective. Indeed, just 10 per cent of Canadians say this time of year is primarily religious for them, though another three-in-ten (30%) say it is both religious and more non-faithfully festive:



Religious observers are going to make changes

For those who are viewing the season from a faith-based perspective, this is another in a year of challenges. Just as with [Easter observances](#), religious Canadians are turning to technology to connect with their communities.

Indeed, 45 per cent of those who view the season religiously or go to church say that they are going to follow a service online this year. Those 55 years of age and older are particularly interested in utilizing this approach: 51 per cent say they will. Notably, younger observers are twice as likely to say they will be using an app for prayer or meditation.

More than two-in-five (44%) are going back to the basics. This group say they will pray at home or simply rely on scripture or holy texts during the season.

How are you planning to mark or celebrate your upcoming holy period? (Among those who view this as a religious time/go to church)				
	Total (n=1,408)	Age		
		18-34 (n=394)	35-54 (n=456)	55+ (n=557)
Follow a religious service online	45%	39%	42%	51%
Pray at home on your own, just relying on scripture or holy texts	44%	45%	40%	47%
Pray with family/other members of your faith using video chat (Skype, Zoom, etc.)	16%	18%	16%	14%
Use an app for prayer, religious guidance, or meditation	9%	14%	7%	8%
Speak to a priest, cleric, or other religious leader over the phone	5%	7%	2%	5%
None of the above	29%	34%	33%	23%

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by COVID-19 concern, [click here](#).

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